

HERSETH SANDLIN, LUMMIS URGE USDA TO COMBAT PINE BEETLE INFESTATION

Washington, DC (April 21, 2010)-Today, Rep. Stephanie Herseth Sandlin (D-SD) and Rep. Cynthia Lummis (R-WY) lead a bipartisan group of their western colleagues in writing to Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack, urging the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) to develop a comprehensive and proactive strategy for responding to the bark beetle epidemics in the West. A full text of the letter is below.

"The damage done by pine beetles dramatically increases the risk of catastrophic wildfires, ultimately endangering the safety of rural communities, inhibiting economic growth and diminishing the role forests play in addressing climate change," Rep. Herseth Sandlin said. "Last year, thanks in part to the efforts of Representative Lummis and me, the Forest Service dedicated \$40 million to combating pine beetles in the Rocky Mountain Region. This funding was a step in the right direction, but we believe that it is absolutely critical that the USDA develop a comprehensive, nationwide plan to address outbreaks of pine beetles. Proactive mitigation and prevention will be more cost-effective than rehabilitation and restoration following catastrophic fires."

"We need to decide as a country what we want our forests to look like for our children and grandchildren," Rep. Lummis said. "Steps need to be taken to ensure the forests we enjoy are not destroyed by the serious threat posed by the bark beetle. Funding is one part of that equation, but developing a comprehensive forest management strategy is also critical. Proactive mitigation and prevention will help restore long-term forest and watershed health."

Current outbreaks of bark beetles, which are occurring in numerous forest ecosystems across western North America, are the largest in recorded history. The current outbreaks are notable for their intensity, extensive range, and simultaneous occurrence in multiple ecosystems. During the last 10 years more than 17 million acres have been affected by bark beetles in the Interior West, including Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, New Mexico, South Dakota, Utah, and Wyoming. In South Dakota's Black Hills, pine beetles have affected over 200,000 acres since the 1990s, killing over 100,000 new trees each year. Nationally, federal land managers estimate that approximately 190 million acres of federal forest lands are at unnaturally high risk of catastrophic wildfire and large-scale insect and disease outbreaks due to unhealthy forest conditions.

The Herseth Sandlin/Lummis letter requests that the USDA plan include projected scope of work, estimated costs, and source of funds. The following members signed the bipartisan letter: John Salazar (D-CO), Betsy Markey (D-CO), Joe Baca (D-CA), Mike Coffman (R-CO), Walt Minnick (D-ID), Jared Polis (D-CO), Diana DeGette (D-CO) and Denny Rehberg (R-MT).

April 21, 2010

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

Current outbreaks of bark beetles, which are occurring in numerous forest ecosystems across western North America, are the largest in recorded history. The current outbreaks are notable for their intensity, extensive range, and simultaneous occurrence in multiple ecosystems. During the last 10 years more than 17 million acres have been affected by bark beetles in the Interior West, including Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, New Mexico, South Dakota, Utah, and Wyoming.

The bark beetle epidemics have created the potential for catastrophic fires that threaten communities, forests, watersheds, wildlife habitat, recreational opportunities, and local tourism industries. Damage to forests in headwater states also jeopardizes the livelihood of wildlife, farms and communities in 'downstream states', whose economic lifeblood depends on the uninterrupted flow of water.

In FY 2010, the Forest Service directed approximately \$74 million to address bark beetle related issues in Colorado, Wyoming, South Dakota, Montana and Idaho. Those funds were urgently needed and greatly appreciated, but the work is far from over. In a June 2008 letter to former Chief Gail Kimbell, Rocky Mountain Regional Forester Rick Cables identified \$82 million in FY 2011 funding needs just for short-term public safety issues associated with the mountain pine beetle epidemic in northern Colorado and southern Wyoming. The job of restoring long-term forest and watershed health will take years, will require additional funding, and demands a comprehensive, coordinated approach to recovery not limited to single regions

The scope and intensity of the bark beetle epidemics warrant an emergency response. The Forest Service does not fight fire emergencies with funds allocated for annual operations. We do not believe that the response to the bark beetle epidemics should be funded out of operating

funds for routine management or proactive programs designed to keep forests healthy or halt the forward progress of bark beetles.

We urge you to develop a comprehensive and proactive strategy for responding to the bark beetle epidemics. This strategy should include the projected scope of work, estimated costs, and source of funds. Proactive mitigation and prevention will be more cost effective than rehabilitation and restoration following catastrophic fires.

Sincerely,